

# Glory to God!

Lk 2:8-20 (text)

25 December 2020, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:00 am  
(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

## Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Has it ever happened to you that someone did an extraordinary kind deed to you – so extraordinary and so kind that it totally blew you away; yes, stunned and moved you to thanksgiving and praise?

It has certainly happened to me and Annette!

Yes, I still remember that time when we were away for a long weekend, preaching somewhere else.

Then, when we arrived back home late at night, our car's lights shone on our garden! I blinked my eyes, to make sure that what I saw was real! And then I just couldn't believe what I saw...! In the few days that we were away, someone had come and given our garden a total makeover – new flower beds, new pot-plants! And whoever did it, it must have taken them a huge physical and financial effort!

And we were stunned! We felt at once small *and* great realising that someone thought so much of *little us*, that they were able to so shower us with love!

The same happened at other times when some other people overwhelmed & surprised us by the most exquisite meals which they delivered at our door!

And I hope you have had similar kindness shown to you!

Question: What happens to your heart and emotion when you have been on the receiving end of such love?

Well, is it not true that you are moved to an enormous gratitude!?

And is it not so that, if you don't know who did those kind deeds to you, you cannot rest until you have found out, visited them, looked them in the eye, hugged them and thanked and praised them!?

My brother & sister, if that's how you & I feel when a *fellow human being* has showered us with deeds of love, how much more will we burst out in praise and thanksgiving when *the Creator of the Universe* has blessed us with the greatest gift ever – a gift that He gave at enormous cost to Himself; and in the most mind-bending show of love & compassion to mankind lost & fallen in sin?

Well, here's the theme (main message) of our Bible text: Christian, are you cut to heart; yes, have you been moved by God's love-deed for you in Christ, His Son? Then, come, let's praise and glorify His holy Name!

Our sermon has three points:

- God's Mind-Bending Love-Deed
- The Angels' Praise
- Man's Praise

## God's Love-Deed (8-12)

It was outside Bethlehem, in a field!

The night was dark! No electricity; no car/truck lights; no modern lights at all! It was even better than the dark night sky I once observed from a pitch-dark lifestyle block east of Havelock North, when I saw more stars than I had ever seen!

But, outside Bethlehem, the night sky was not just *dark*; no, it was also *quiet*! Yes, no noises of trucks, cars, trains and planes! Indeed, apart from the usual night noises – like a restless bird, a few crickets, and one/two bleating sheep – it was quiet; really a *silent night*!

A few shepherds were with their sheep! They were taking turns to keep watch!

Suddenly, and without any human being coming to forewarn those shepherds, the darkness gets driven away – expelled. An angel of the LORD appears! Yes, amidst the pitch dark, *suddenly* there shines the brightest light!

Why?

Because of the *shekinah*<sup>1</sup> of the LORD – yes, because of God’s *glorious presence*, which accompanied that angel! And so, God’s shekinah shone all around those shepherds!

And they were filled with great fear – as the King James Version says, “***They were sore afraid!***”<sup>2</sup>

Why were they afraid?

Well, imagine God’s glorious presence! It is *so* bright! Look, is that not why the Bible tells us that the New Jerusalem won’t even need the sun’s light, for *God* will be its light!?<sup>3</sup>

And does not the Bible tell us that it was the same glorious presence of God which once had His people trembling with fear there where He descended on Mt Sinai as He gave the Law to Moses!<sup>4</sup>

And the same fear also once gripped Isaiah when he saw the glory of God filling the whole temple – and he reacted, “***Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips...!***”<sup>5</sup>

And so, the shepherds outside Bethlehem were afraid – sore afraid!

And wouldn’t we all be afraid?

I mean, do you still remember what happened one Sunday morning, just over a year ago? Remember how, at 5 a.m. on Sunday 8 Dec 2019, we all got woken up by a two-hour-long display of thunder & lightning? And many Wellingtonians were in awe! Some admitted that they were terrified – sore afraid! Some even thought it was the end of the world!

My brother & sister, that display of thunder & lighting and the accompanying deluge that blocked all exists from Wellington – that was nothing compared to God’s glory that shone around those Bethlehem shepherds!

And you & I will see that glory on the Last Day when Christ returns!

Well, our text gives us the angel’s comforting words (v.10): “***Do not be afraid...!***” – words which the Baby in Bethlehem’s manger would later on often use on the disciples...<sup>6</sup>

You ask, “But why was there that night such a frightening display of God’s glory?”

Well, the angel’s message explains – and I paraphrase...

“Dear shepherds, do you remember the promised Messiah for whom God’s people have been waiting, for so long? Well, here is the best news of great joy for you & all God’s loved ones (elect): today, that very Messiah has been born!

And here are three words by which I will describe Him for you:

- *Saviour*, for He will *save* His people from their sins – the most important calamity to be saved from;
- *Christ/Messiah*, for He is *anointed* by God into this mind-bending office;
- *Lord*, for He is no ordinary human being, but Lord of heaven & earth!”

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<sup>1</sup> שְׂכִינָה (shekinah) = “*Shechinah, Divine Presence, holy inspiration*” (Jastrow, Marcus. 1950. A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature. Vol. II. New York : Pardes Publishing House. p.1573).

<sup>2</sup> Lk 2:9 ***And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid*** (KJV).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rv 21:23 ***And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.***

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ex 20:18-19, ***When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance <sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.”***

<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Is 6:5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. e.g., Mt 10:31; 14:27; 17:7; Mk 5:36; Lk 5:10; 8:50; 12:7 etc.

My brother & sister, see why on that night God's glory was on display?

It is because that night God, in mercy & grace – and in compassion with mankind fallen in sin – has done the unthinkable! Yes, in that Baby lying in a manger, the Second Person in the Godhead, without putting off His divine nature, had clothed Himself with human body & soul to come rescue His loved ones from sin & satan!

See the greatest love-deed ever!?

So, see why God's glory was brilliantly displayed that night?

Says the angel, "Now, go into Bethlehem town and see for yourselves!"

"And how will you recognise God's Son?" Yes, how will you be able to tell the difference between other Bethlehem babies and this baby?"

"Well, He will be the only new-born baby lying in an animal trough!"

But, just like other babies, He, too, will be swaddled in cloth!

Why?

Well, for the same reason as any other baby is swaddled, i.e., to restrict the movements of His arms & legs so that He would not startle Himself awake! Besides, swaddling makes a baby feel like he's back in the womb and nicely snuggled up!<sup>7</sup>

Swaddling restricts a baby's movements!

Someone might say, "But can this really be?" "God's Son reduced to the status of human baby – the everywhere-present God now restricted by swaddling cloth?" "And God's Son not lying in a bassinet somewhere in a palace, but in a stable and even in a trough from which animals feed?" "I mean, what's glorious about that!?"

My brother & sister, here's a bonus: In Christ's humble coming, God is teaching us a lesson, i.e., that greatness is not to be linked with your address (the house or the neighbourhood you're living in); nor is it to be associated with the vehicle you drive; nor tied to the clothes you wear, etc.

Instead, God's glory is seen in a serving humility!

Why?

Well, does not 2 Cor 8:9 give the answer?

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*<sup>8</sup>

See the greatest love-deed ever!?! For you? For me?

And see how God chose to display His glory only to a select few? Yes, not to the self-righteous theologians in Jerusalem, but to ordinary people of the day (shepherds)?

Does that not move you to awe?

Well, it moved even the angels of heaven to awe (praise) – which bring us to point 2...

### **The Angels' Praise (13-14)**

Suddenly this one angel is no longer alone with the shepherds, for, God unleashed a whole heavenly army<sup>9</sup> of angels who burst out in song!

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<sup>7</sup> "Swaddling has been part of caring for babies for centuries — millennia, really. It makes a baby feel like he's back inside the womb — or like he is being snuggled close. It has been shown to help many babies sleep better. It can be particularly helpful for babies with neurologic problems or colic, or for babies born addicted to drugs.

It also can really help some parents get their babies to fall and stay asleep on their backs, which is what we recommend to help prevent sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS. Some babies have trouble with sleeping on their backs because they startle themselves awake; when they are swaddled, that's less likely to happen" (Claire McCarthy, MD. Senior Faculty Editor, Harvard Health Publishing. **Should you swaddle your baby?**

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/should-you-swaddle-your-baby-201605249730>).

<sup>8</sup> *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (2 Co 8:9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>9</sup> **στρατιὰ οὐράνιος**: (an idiom, literally 'heavenly army') a large group or throng of angels—'throng of angels, ranks of angels' (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 144). New York: United Bible Societies).

How considerate of God that He did not reverse the order – yes, that He did not first send the *whole army of angels*, but that He first sent *just one angel*! Indeed, not until the shepherds had become used to the heavenly brilliance that blazed all around them – not until they had received from this one angel the message of great joy, did God send the whole army of angels!

And they're singing!

What are they singing?

Glory! Glory to God in the highest!

Why would the angels sing God's glory when His Son has just taken a huge dip in status – when God's Son has just humbled Himself immensely by having clothed Himself with human body & soul!?

I mean, from an angel's perspective, is this not a time for *mourning*, rather than singing *glory to God*!?

Well, no! These angels are doing the right thing!

You see, they had been associated with Christ in heaven, before He came down to earth in human body & soul!

There in heaven, they knew of His glory, riches, and majesty!<sup>10</sup>

But these angels had also become aware of man's fall into sin!

And they had been informed that God had provided a way of salvation for man! Is this not clear from what the *Angel Gabriel* said to Joseph, "***You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins***"? (Mt 1:21)

Did this army of angels also grasp that God's love for His people will, at the same time, deal His justice of great pain on His Son? Yes, did they know that God would not *spare* His own Son? Did this glory-singing angel-army know that God's Son – although He was rich – would become poor, so poor that He would bear the curse that was on God's people?

And did they know that God's Holy Spirit would condescend to such low level as dwelling in sinners' hearts, and apply to them the salvation earned by God's Son!?

In short: did these glory-singing angels understand the pain which this manger-lying Baby would one day suffer?<sup>11</sup>

Well, *this* you & I can at least assume: that this very lowly birth of Christ must have caused these angels to stand in awe of God's mind-bending love! (The same reason why the Apostle Paul burst out in praise of God, "***Thanks be to God for His inexpressible Gift!***" cf. 2 Cor 8:9;<sup>12</sup> 9:15<sup>13</sup>).

And so, they sing! And they sing to the glory of God!

But that's not all that they're singing!

No, here is the last part of their song: "...***on earth peace ....***"<sup>14</sup>

Is this peace to every single person on earth?

No, for the angels' song says, "...***on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.***"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Is 6:1-4 ***In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"***

<sup>4</sup> ***And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.***

Also cf. the light which Jn 12:41 sheds on the Isaiah prophecies. Here is Jn 12:41 ***Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.***

Also cf. HENDRIKSEN, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Books. p.155).

<sup>11</sup> cf. 1 Pt 1:12, for the angels' incomplete understanding, ***It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.***

<sup>12</sup> 2 Cor 8:9 ***For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.***

<sup>13</sup> 2 Cor 9:15 ***Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!***

<sup>14</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 2:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>15</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 2:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Why only on them?

Well, because they only are the ones who would receive this Son of God as their Saviour & Lord – the One whose atoning death would make them right with God and give them this peace – yes, this heavenly peace (serenity) – which only those who know they are right with God can have!

**“Peace to those on whom His favour rests!”**

Look is it not this peace of which we hear in Rm 5:1 **“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”**?<sup>16</sup>

And you know what? This peace is not tied to your/my physical circumstances! Look, is that not why the Apostle Paul was able to say (in Rm 5:3) **“...but we also rejoice in our sufferings?”**

See the incredible nature of this peace?

See why the army of angels praised God in Bethlehem’s illumined night sky!?

Do you have this peace?

Here’s the last point...

### **Man’s Praise (15-20)**

The angels have left! The epiphany is over!

What will the shepherds now do!?

I mean, the angel gave them the best news ever!

So, it’s like the minister has preached! What will the congregation do? Will they follow God’s instruction!?

The doctor has written the prescription! What will the sick man do? Will he get the medicine and drink it?

Well, deeply moved – and still in awe of God’s glory – these shepherds did not let the grass grow under feet! Our text tells us they went to Bethlehem in a hurry (v.16). And they *did* find everything just as they had been told – yes, even the Baby in the trough!

What then?

Well, then they burst out in thanksgiving! And The words of their mouths went in two directions:

- to *people* who were amazed as the shepherds told them about the Child (17-18);
- and to God as they glorify & praise Him (20)!

Why could they not keep their mouths shut?

Because they were moved (cut to the heart)!

Why?

Well, because they have met Christ, God’s Gift, in person! And the way in which they met Him was just as Christ Himself would later on explain, i.e., by the powerful drawing/pulling of God the Father: **“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...”**<sup>17</sup>

See why the shepherds’ mouths burst out in thanksgiving and praise!?

They had face-to-face encounter with Christ, their Saviour and Lord!

Do you & I want the same to happen to us?

There’s only one way, i.e., you must have a personal encounter with Christ! Yes, you must receive Him as your Saviour & Lord!

How does one receive Christ as your Saviour & Lord?

Yes, how does God draw a person to Christ?

Through His Word empowered by His Holy Spirit!

And that’s why you & I have come to this Christmas service this morning – for, by God’s gracious guidance, we wanted to be under the sound of His Holy-Spirit enhanced Word today!

My brother & sister, God has given us the greatest Gift ever – greater than any gift any human being could give us!

So, why will we not do what the angels & shepherds did – thank Him, and spread His praises abroad!?

AMEN (2454 words excluding footnotes)

<sup>16</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ro 5:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>17</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Jn 6:44). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.